

§ SAKUMO Romance

LOVE WITH A FIVE-YEAR OLD

Narteh Akpanglo-Nartey



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Tetteh was a young instructor in a teacher training college when he met Stella. Forgetting the fact that he was Stella's teacher, he allowed himself to fall in love with her. Then he became aware that what the Ghanaian public frowned on the most was a teacher-student love affair. He realized the situation he would put himself in if the all-powerful Ministry of Education got to know that he was entangled in.... Then there was Fofo, Stella's closest friend, who also claimed to be in love with him. And, to make matters even worse, his own extended family wanted him to come 'home' to marry from among his own ethnic group. Did Tetteh love Stella enough to withstand these tests?

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Belatedly for Janet
with much appreciation
of her courageous support

ONE

THERE WAS AN unspoken calm around her as she stood motionless for what seemed to be hours in the doorway. Her cream-coloured uniform shone dazzlingly in the early morning sun. The creases were sharp enough to deter the occasional fly from landing on the uniform.

When she finally met Tetteh's eyes, she glided slowly but deliberately towards his position by the oversized teacher's desk. A mischievous smile transformed the corners of her lips into the petals of an early spring rose. When she finally stopped some three feet from him, she took a lazy look at his face before uttering the accustomed, "Good morning, sir."

Her voice sounded as though it had floated from some distance beyond where the two stood. Tetteh hesitated before responding to the greeting, feeling a bit foolish. 'Did she really say something or am I just imagining?' he thought.

"Fine morning. And how are you this lovely day?"

"I couldn't be better, judging from you," she said, her entire face breaking up in a warm smile.

Tetteh became self-conscious as he realized he had been staring at her since her arrival. Had his complexion been a bit lighter, one could have lit a cigarette by his blush. He managed to divert his gaze for the first time. Even so, his stare remained on her body. First, he surveyed her small delicate looking feet in the regulation black shoes. His eyes then moved up to take in the pair of shapely lower legs that showed beneath the knee-high skirt. Slowly, as though time never mattered, he moved his gaze upwards to focus on her perfectly shaped, uniform clad hips. Moving his gaze up farther, he noticed again how her hips tapered into a very small waist. He swallowed hard as his eyes, moving further up, fell on her orange-sized breasts.

He thought back on their first meeting when he had attempted to describe her body with anything but the cliché "hour-glass figure." He realized now that since then he had spent quite a few of his waking hours trying to come up with such a description. For the first time since then, he appreciated the effect this girl was having on his thoughts and, subsequently, his daily existence. 'A chocolate bar with two oranges stuck to the front ...,' he began to mutter to himself before realizing that he was also under observation. He coughed nervously as he looked back at her face to meet a broad appreciative smile.

"Do you want these or not?" she asked jokingly.

For the first time, he noticed her extended right hand. In it were two pressed white handkerchiefs. His. He had left them with her the previous afternoon after athletic training, so she could wash them for him. *Now why did he do that?* He realized how foolish he might have looked. Clumsily, he shoved his right hand towards hers.

"Pardon my ... " he started to say only to find out that he didn't know exactly what to say. He definitely couldn't say, 'Pardon my attempt at stripping you naked with my eyes' -- which would have been the truth. At the same time, he detected something in those eyes that warned him from lying to her. He let the sentence hang in the air.

"It's perfectly okay," she assured him. She took one quick look at the lab before turning to go.

"You aren't ... Are you ...?" But he couldn't complete the question. Instead, he stared open-mouthed and lustfully at her beautiful face, concentrating on her high cheek bones.

"Don't worry, I'll see you later. I have a class with you in a couple of hours. Remember, master?" The last word was uttered in mock contempt.

"Ugh - oh." was all he could say. Funny how his tongue always seemed tied in the presence of this girl -- young woman. He watched her glide out of the lab, her hips swaying as though to some internal music.

The blood rushed through his veins as he brought the handkerchiefs to his nostrils to inhale

her fresh scent in them. Still clutching the hankies, he tried to set up the apparatus for the day's class experiments. But his mind refused to cooperate. Instead, it stayed with the young lady who had just left the science laboratory. Finding it difficult to concentrate, he decided to go for a quick stroll to help him clear his head.

Outside the lab, Tetteh headed for a rarely used farm road behind the college. He walked slowly on the side of the road, not caring \what direction he was headed in. His thoughts kept going back to the young woman who had just left the lab. More precisely, the *student* that walked out of *his* lab a little while back. 'Yes,' he admitted to himself, 'She *is* my student, and I *am* her instructor.'

He felt the need to 'nip this romance in the bud' before he got into any trouble ... before he got labeled as the immoral teacher \who seduced his innocent students. At the same time, he knew he wouldn't have thought twice about what he'd do if he hadn't been carrying the label 'instructor' and she 'student.'

'Labels, names, and stigmas,' he reflected. He stopped moving. 'Why should I worry about what names people call me, so long as I know what I am?' He kicked a small stone to the side of the road. He walked to the stone and kicked it a second time. He started to walk towards it again but changed his mind and stopped all motion.

"What *is* in a name?" he asked out loud. "Or should I say 'what is in name calling'?" He considered answers of some of the philosophers who had already grappled with this issue. He

decided he preferred Shakespeare's solution: "A rose by any other name should smell as sweet." There was absolutely nothing in a name, he concluded. After all there was no reason why we should call the item used in locking doors a *key*. We could call it a "sword" if we wanted to, and it would still lock our doors for us.

Tetteh agreed that it was not so much the name one was called, as the intentions that accompanied the name calling. He, more than anyone else, should know this. Why, as a child he had been called half a dozen names by different sectors of his extended family. Names that included 'alligator' even. But he had responded to all because he knew his relatives meant no harm.

In other words, he argued, the name itself is not enough. It is the connotation of such a name. A *good* name. That was what one should strive for. Even having arrived at this conclusion did not solve Tetteh's problem. Knowing as much as he did about the Ghanaian public, how could he openly show his affections to this young woman-his student -- and still carry his good name? As far as he was concerned, that was nearly impossible. But he remained defiant. 'Who, by the way decides on the quality good?' he asked himself.

Even then he realized that in the present days, to be good meant doing one's bad things secretly. He saw also that when X was described as a good man it meant X usually hid all his wickedness. Or if Y was described as one of the morally sound heads of institutions it only meant that Y was one of those who went about their weaknesses so care-

fully that people didn't often catch them in the act. And more than often, Tetteh noticed, it meant that those who described Y as good had had some favour from him. Not that there weren't any strings attached to such favours.

Tetteh looked at his hands. The handkerchiefs were still in his left hand. He smelled them once more, his eyes sweeping around him. The road was empty. Yet he felt someone was watching him. 'An unhealthy behaviour,' he reproached himself. Then, making up his mind, he took some long strides towards the science laboratory. There was still much time but he had to arrange the apparatus he would need for his next lesson.

A tap on his shoulder made him turn. It was Mr. Odjeno, the P.E. and games instructor.

"A penny for your thoughts," Odjeno greeted Tetteh.

"Oh, hello. What are you doing here?" Tetteh asked the older man.

"Shouldn't I be asking you that, seeing that you are the one I am following?" Odjeno retorted.

Tetteh ignored the sarcasm in Odjeno's voice. He explained that he had an extremely complicated demonstration coming and he thought it would be good to go for a brisk walk first before tackling it. Odjeno laughed, pointing out that Tetteh hadn't been walking at all for well over ten minutes. The latter asked how Odjeno knew. Odjeno admitted following him from a distance since heading for the road. The admission angered Tetteh who tried his best to control his temper.

"You mean you saw everything?" he asked as calmly as he could.

"Yap," Odjeno answered, chuckling.

"Including ...?"

"Yap, I saw her coming out of the lab too." "Oh shit."

"Nothing to go shitting about." Odjeno put a hand on the younger man's shoulder. I just came to remind you that you have a class in a few minutes." He was still chuckling to himself.

"Holy shit," Tetteh cried out after glancing at his wrist watch.

"Now, calm down, Tetteh. You still have some time."

But Tetteh was already trotting away. He had run halfway to the lab when he remembered something else and stopped. He hadn't finished assembling all the pieces for the day's experiment. Worse, not all could be found in the lab. He changed directions and rushed to the principal's house for a block of ice and some crystals of salt. He was really indebted to the class he taught that morning. A first year class, they were all boys! Not that they'd be happy to know they're being called boys. Of course, most of them were married. That was the characteristic of training college students, most had taught for some years in the capacity of pupil-teachers before entering college. The lively discussion that accompanied the experiments really turned him into a normal human being. At the beginning of the lesson he broke a test tube. He had started the demonstration only to find he was still clutching those hankies. In trying

to keep them in a neat place his eyes left the main job, thus allowing his elbow the freedom of pushing the test tube over. That made most of the students very watchful -- In case he should break another one.

And the outcome?

Well, they became very interested in the day's job. Tetteh would have scored full marks if he had been observed (or "chopped") by one of his lecturers, even though he still felt somewhat distracted by memories of the mornings encounter with his other student.

TWO

TETTEH WAS THE only instructor that sat in the back of the truck. All the three other instructors on their way to the match sat in front with the driver. Not that he couldn't have sat there with the others. German made, the Robur truck had a five-seater front cabin. But, he felt happy at the back, especially since the students sitting on the last seat with him decided to face the back of the truck. They asked him if he would mind. He shook his head, and simply did as they wanted. He turned around to face the back of the truck -- just like the students.

Nor did his presence at the back there have any sobering effect on them. On the contrary, they sang at the top of their voices, beating the side of the *Kpanlogo* truck when they felt like it. Tetteh had done worse things in his student days. He remembered even stamping his feet on the floor of the truck to give the rhythm. Those were the days that he forced people to tolerate him as an individual. Even if he was not playing in a particular match, nobody dared leave him behind.

A strong nostalgia seized him.

The good old days!

He felt like singing with his students. He discovered to his delight that most of the songs were familiar to him. On a few occasions he also hummed the tunes. Once in a while he became aware of his body shaking with the rhythm.

Once they sang a song in which the names of all the instructors on the truck were mentioned. Even Tetteh's - - though he was right there with them. They even asked in a song: "Mr. Tetteh, where's your love?" They answered it themselves with: "Ae ... ei, Everybody has his lover." He became startled.

If some student had been watching him at that time, that student might have noticed that Tetteh stole a look at one of the girl students on the truck. And if that student had happened to go into details he would have seen that she was the same girl that had handed the handkerchiefs to Tetteh in the science laboratory that morning. He looked away as fast as he had looked there, to avoid any SuspIcIOn.

After the song the students burst into laughter. Tetteh laughed too. But his eyes didn't miss one of the table tennis stars as the latter put his hand on her shoulders. One could see at once that Tetteh didn't like the idea. Unwillingly, however, he moved his eyes from the scene. He asked the nearest student to give him the names of the various villages they passed. Repeating the names after the boy made him ease down on his thoughts a bit more than he could have done by will power

alone. Once or twice Tetteh pronounced the names wrongly, and some female voices (including hers) laughed at him.

The truck was traveling at top speed. Tetteh knew this. Because, apart from the change in the *Kpanlogo* truck's tone, each time he put his hand on the side, the air pushed it violently back. That was what students liked. They wished it would go faster.

When they were not singing, they chatted away merrily. Tetteh's mind, however, was not really in the truck. He looked out at the huge trees of the forest on both sides of the road as they hurried past the truck. As the noise in the truck increased, Tetteh -- from experience -- became convinced that they were nearing the town.

Like Nkawkaw Training College, where Tetteh was now teaching, Tafo Training College was only a two-class college. But where the latter had first and fourth year students the former, having been started only the previous year, had first and second year students. Like Nkawkaw Training College again the Tafo compound was very small. But where the girls of the former were on the same compound with the boys, the girls at the latter were at an entirely different place. One had to cross the street and walk some two hundred yards to get to the girls' block. The hedges surrounding the campus stood some three inches above Tetteh's head.

That was pretty high for hedges, Tetteh thought. Thinking back to the low kept hedges of their own campus, Tetteh shook his head. The

campus of Tafo Training College was, however, very tidy.

After they were given the time that both the volley ball match and the table tennis tournament would start, the students wandered off in all directions. Tetteh called the girl to come. He had by, this time learned that she was called Stella Obebi. She came shyly over to him.

He asked, "Where are you off to?" She said, "I am going home."

"Do you live around here?"

She nodded. "Some two miles from here. Tafo New Town, they call it."

"I see." But he didn't. "Would you mind taking me along?" he asked, strongly hoping he wouldn't be disappointed.

She fixed her eyes on a leaf on the ground.

Then pointing to the girl at her side, "I am only going with Lizzie here. So if you wouldn't be bored ...," She broke off as Mr. Odjeno called her from behind. She turned to face him.

"I am giving you only thirty minutes in and out, hear?" Odjeno announced, getting closer.

"Yes sir."

"And you Lizie, mustn't go with her." "Oh please."

Tetteh stepped in before he realized it.

"I am taking them along. We won't be long."

With disappointment registered all over his face, Odjeno protested, "But we have to see the Tafo Sports master."

Tetteh asked, "And is it necessary I also go?"

Yet he knew that he shouldn't have asked that.

For, he was aware of the trust that Odjeno and the other instructors had placed in him, looking to him always to defend them in time of trouble.

"Yes," Odjeno answered, and on second thought, added, "we are planning to go to the new town Why not let's see the instructor in charge first; then we all go -- with the *Kpanlogo*, I mean."

With the smile of a hero, Tetteh said, "Okay," and told the two females to wait at the side of the road while they saw to business.

Again, Tetteh sat at the back of the truck, this time with the two girls only, while the other instructors joined the driver in front.

He and the girls spent a quiet time there while the truck swayed through the various streets of the town -- an obviously well-planned one. It was quite unlike most Ghanaian towns where all the houses were clustered at the side of the single road passing through them. Stella shouted at the driver to stop at a junction somewhere. He also shouted back that he was taking them to the house.

"Do you hail from here?" Tetteh asked Stella as the truck finally stopped by a small estate house.

"We are only staying here, but we are originally from Kankan."

"I see. And this is your house?" She nodded.

"It's very nice."

"Thank you."

She got down and led the way into the neatly arranged sitting room. Having given the others seats, Stella sent a small girl into the compound for

her father. She then went for glasses and brought them water to drink. The three children playing in the compound had stopped and came to peep through the door-way to look at the strangers. Tetteh called the smallest -- a girl -- and asked her name.

"Ekua", was the answer.

He asked her of her health and she replied that she was just fine.

"Do you like me?" he asked her again, pushing a five-pesewa coin into her hand.

She said, "Very much" and wished she could even follow him to his house.

The other children also walked in on Tetteh when they saw the money in their younger sister's hand. He fished two coins out of his pocket and gave them to the children. A short stout man, whom Stella later introduced as her father, came in shortly afterwards. He welcomed the visitors with a hearty smile, shaking hands with them all. Mr. Obebi-Kwesi, for that was his name, inquired from his daughter if the visitors had been served with water, as she started to introduce them. Lizie and Tetteh happened to be the only new faces. Mr. Obebi-Kwesi, it was explained later, was in the habit of visiting his child at college, where he often met the staff members. His handshake was warm, though gentle. And he talked with the air of a loving father placing his child under the care of trusted people.

Tetteh was flattered.

Mr. Obebi-Kwesi took his visitors to the football field opposite his house. A sign board wel-

corned them to the c.R.I.G. Experimental School. But they didn't go there. They entered a large room with the sign *CANTEEN*. He made the visitors sit around a table in the corner while he walked to the counter. Odjeno asked the two girls something that Tetteh could not hear. The driver also walked in, said something to one of the instructors and found his way back, turning down the invitation to come and drink. The waiter followed Mr. Obebi with three bottles of Fanta and four bottles of beer. He and the two girls helped themselves to the minerals whilst the rest took a bottle of beer each. They were more than grateful to Mr. Obebi, who looked very happy with the group. But that didn't stop the wild ideas that were forming in Tetteh's head. If anything, it even made them form more. He even thought, after watching Stella sip the Fanta calmly; 'A pity she couldn't take beer.' Rising to their feet, the visitors thanked Mr. Obebi and bade him farewell.

The volleyball match had started when Stella and her followers arrived on the training college campus. The table tennis was to start some few minutes from then.

Tetteh asked the other instructors: "What about some 'palms'?"

They all agreed that it was a good idea and left the campus in search of the palm wine. Odjeno, who was supposed to be the leader, forgot where they got the 'palms' the previous year. He had to send back for Tawuta, one of the students, who showed them the way.

"We have to hurry through this so that we are

not late for the tournament," Odjeno reminded them.

They agreed.

Yet they were late, and somehow tipsy when they left finally.

A loud cheer greeted them on the way. They became worried, because that meant the home team was leading. They rushed into the hall where the tournament had just started. Luckily they weren't being beaten. The students had grouped themselves at the two sides while a few stood at the ends of the table.

A long-range smash came from the Nkawkaw player just when Tetteh stepped in. This was greeted by shouts of "Way Nkawkaw." Instinctively, Tawuta rushed to the side of the Tafo player and pulled a face at him. The player became so offended that he wanted to hit Tawuta with his bat. The umpire caught the ball in mid-air and asked Tawuta to walk out, pushing the Nkawkaw supporters to one side. But the student wouldn't walk out. Odjeno had to go and plead with him to go and stand on the verandah. This done, the game was allowed to continue.

Tetteh sat down and lit a cigarette. But his mind was not on the cigarette. The match stick, which remained in his hand, burnt his finger tips. Disgusted, he threw it away. With deep admiration, he watched the heads of the spectators as they moved from side to side. He guessed that some were moving as much as fifty times per minute. Per hour? That'd be plenty!

"Get ready to umpire the second half of the

tournament," Odjeno whispered into Tetteh's ear. Tetteh thought that was a bad idea, since he was already planning something else he wished to do. Nevertheless, he said "Okay," and went out.

He walked round to the other door of the hall and, beckoning Tawuta to come, asked him to call "that girl," pointing at Stella. Either intentionally or unintentionally Tawuta called Lizie, so Tetteh said, "No, the other one." And Stella came.

"I have no doubt you know this area," Tetteh said. "And if so, that you know where a canteen, club, or simply beer bar can be found."

And Stella came.

"Yes, I think there's an old pub down town."

He inquired, "You'll lead the way there, won't you?"

She pointed at the hall.

"But the other students ..., "she protested. "What about them?" he queried as if he needed an answer, adding, "Forget about them. I am going out with *you* and not the others."

She opened her mouth once more only to close it at the lack of words. She was probably too shy to protest. Instead she turned and did as she was told.

About fifteen minutes later, they were in an old deserted pub; one of those you often came across in villages. Except that this one was a little better. From the counter they had to walk through another door into the sitting area. There were only two tables, and Tetteh had to arrange the chairs himself.

Why that always happened, he didn't know. But people were not in the habit of selling things to

him. It was probably due to his bodily structure and also his behaviour. Well over six feet, he was very stout and had a chocolate complexion. His chest was very broad and his hands hung firmly by his side. His head was always decorated in a real navy-cut. On no occasion did he smile to people showing his teeth -- not that he couldn't boast of a nice set of teeth. The cunning way in which he looked at people and things often made people believe that Tetteh was a special agent of the police. And since most sellers sold their commodities above the controlled price of the country, they thought Tetteh would take them to task if they sold things to him.

The woman who was in the pub said there might be only a bottle of beer left. On pleading for some time, Tetteh discovered that he could even get a dozen or more bottles -- if he wanted. He placed the order for three bottles and took his seat at the opposite side of the table from Stella.

"My father doesn't agree to my drinking beer," Stella protested when Tetteh filled her glass.

"He isn't here to see you, and sucks to him, anyway."

"Still, he wouldn't like it if he hears about it. Nor would I like the consequences if he does."

"He doesn't look that strict. And you better forget about him when you are with me, anyway."

She gave Tetteh a suspicious, though soft, look. He went on.

"What I mean is; it's no use behaving as if you were a very small child. Only small children say

things like 'Papa says that isn't good ' Do you see?"

She nodded half heartedly.

He emptied the contents of his glass in a gulp, filled it again before looking up. Even then he avoided looking directly into her face.

"And I hear you are the fastest girl on the campus," he continued. "That apart from being the women's sports captain, the only trophy we have in the college was won by you."

She nodded again, rather shyly. "Fine, can I have a bet with you?" She looked interested.

"If you are able to retain the trophy this year," he went on. "And if possible, add another one, there's going to be a jolly present for you."

Stella's mouth twitched.

Tetteh filled their glasses and pushed the empty bottles aside. He looked round the fairly lighted room, his eyes missing nothing. He noticed that the clay walls were very thick -- nearly three times the thickness of the modern buildings. He knew he didn't have to blame the old people who built such thick walls. He reasoned that in a way they were very wise because they didn't want it to get broken very easily. If the builders had had cement in their days, Tetteh admitted, they could have put up less clumsy buildings than they did. He looked back at Stella. When their eyes met, he cocked an eye at her.

She said: "You see, my father didn't like the idea and says I should not take part in sports again."

"Why?" Tetteh asked, a little amused.

She cleared her throat.

"After the sports meet last year I fell sick," she explained. "And he says if I dare take part again I must be prepared to bear the consequences."

A frail hand removed a small white handkerchief from the purse she held and wiped her mouth with it.

"And this is what frightens you. A little baby you are. Look, can I promise that whatever happens I am prepared to bear the responsibilities?"

"But you didn't let me finish," she protested.

"He also said" "Yes? He said what?"

"He said that the sporting activities have been affecting my schoolwork."

"Well are they?"

She made no attempt to answer him. "I see," said Tetteh.

He emptied his glass, filled it and urged her to drink on. Looking at her in a casual way, he judged her to be a really competent drinking partner. For, there was only a slight color in her eyes. He shook his head and got to his feet. He walked back into the small room and asked the small boy present for three more bottles of beer. He used the short time at his disposal in deciding what to say next. He smiled to himself as he hit on an idea.

"Supposing, just supposing, eh?" he said as he dropped into his seat once more. "Okay, supposing I could find some means of bringing you up to the level of your classmates or perhaps a little higher, would you promise to take part in the sports meet?"

"I can't promise now," she said thoughtfully. "And why not?" he queried. "I say if there is any mishap during or after the track meet I am prepared to ... I mean, I am responsible. That is number one. And two, I am prepared to bring your studies back up to the standard of the class, if not a little higher. What then is your problem, my dear lady?" He couldn't believe he has just made these promises to a student he barely knew. Neither could he help querying his own motives. But he couldn't go back on his word now that he had said it, could he? He looked up at her with an inquiring gaze.

She smiled.

"There's none," she finally replied after what seemed like ages.

"Fine, let's make it a deal then," he said triumphantly.

Tetteh pulled a cigarette from his breast pocket and inspected it critically as though he expected to find poison on it. He offered it to Stella who refused it with the question: "Do you smoke often?" He fumbled with the match box in his hand for a while before offering an answer.

"Not very often, said he, lighting the cigarette.

"I mostly smoke when drinking, though." He stole a glance at her. "You don't smoke, I presume?"

She laughed between her teeth.

"guess this will be my last for the day. Does that sit well with you?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Good. And back to our business now. I reckon I shall use much of my spare time either

coaching you on the track or giving you some tips about studying. Indeed studying is not really cramming things, you know?" He thought back on his own school days and slapped his thighs playfully. He told her about the number of hours he spent on the sports field each day, and how most students just took it for granted that he would perform the worst on exams. But, he shook his head, adding; "And it's a big BUT. Things turned out to be quite different."

She was interested.

"I had my own methods of studying," he continued. "And that's what I am going to do to help you. And, believe it or not, you are going to perform wonders ... How do you like the idea?"

"My father is what I fear," she hesitated.

"Look here, girl, how old are you?"

"Twenty."

"What?" He said in mock surprise. "You are not serious."

"Seriously"

"And how do you figure you are twenty?"

Reluctantly, she said, "If you must know, I was born on the twenty-ninth of February, nineteen forty-eight."

Tetteh did some fast thinking and broke out, laughing. As it was, the twenty-ninth of February struck him as a rather odd date on which to give birth to a beautiful girl like Stella. He couldn't help laughing the more when he noticed the sign of uneasiness on Stella's face.

"I see," he said. "You celebrated your fifth birthday only last February. That explains a lot of

things."

"No!" she shouted in surprise.

"Yes."

"No."

"Look, look. Nineteen forty-eight was a leap year and that's why there was a 29th of February, right?" he explained. "But the other leap years after that were '52, '56, '60, '64, and this year '68. So that in actual fact you have seen only five of your birthdays. "

"Oh Mr. Tetteh, don't you think I know any of this? You're just being funny." But she was delighted.

"No, I am not. And that, incidentally, explains your behavior. You are only a five year old. Okay, I'll now talk to you and treat you as such. Probably there'd be some headway then."

Stella eyed him with childish admiration mingled with confusion. Confusion about what she felt for this teaser sitting before him. She wondered if she could really get to know this man the way she wished she did...

Her eyebrows were slightly drawn in as she eyed him. A child angel couldn't have been more beautiful, but for the wings she didn't possess. He closed his eyes and tried to see the picture before him. His face beamed with pleasure as he did so. It was easy to detect his feelings that time. Having occurred to him that she might suddenly flyaway and leave him, he opened his eyes hastily. But there she was in front of him with her sparkling eyes and.... She looked sweeter than ever. How could he suspect that she was also forming almost

identical mental pictures of him. But that was exactly what Stella was doing. Tetteh gave her a broad smile which she returned. Little did she know how he wanted to embrace her in his arms and say the sweetest things into her ears

Just then he became aware of the fact that he was Stella's teacher. And that what the Ghanaian public frowned on the most was a teacher making love to his student. He became aware also of the situation he'd put himself in if the all-powerful Ministry of Education got to know that he was entangled in.... He scratched his head.

The hand that had been moving involuntarily towards Stella's legs stopped in mid-air. Undecided, the hand went back to the glass on the table, and gripping it firmly, sent the beer in it down Tetteh's throat in one gulp. He cleared his throat for the sentence that refused to come out. He looked out through the window in search of some topic .just some odd topic that would fill the sharp silence that had evolved. Instead, all that his mind could do was curse the public and the damned ministry. He even chose to curse himself -- for his weakness.

He waited for her to finish and holding his hand to her. led the way from the place.

THREE

HIS EYES RESTED on the not so massive, not so slender body as it slowly moved towards him. He gratefully responded to the broad smile on her face. She stopped about a couple of feet before him.

“Good morning, Master,” she said displaying her beautiful set of teeth.

“Fine morning,” Tetteh responded, almost mechanically. “How is life?”

“Ah, not so bad”

“And not so good, I suppose?”

“Maybe.”

A male student passed by the couple with a deep “good morning.” The student eyed the fair colored girl in a very strange – but not unaccusing – way. Tetteh looked concerned, but not Fofo, the girl standing in front of Tetteh. She did not seem to take any notice even. Cheerfully she passed a hand over her plaited hair.

“Yes?” he asked her. “What can I do for you?” She looked at him in the face.

“The other day, you told me to see you but I could not do that before you left for the house and”

Oh ...,” Tetteh interrupted. He thought of something to say – just an excuse to give -- but nothing came immediately. He scratched his head for what he wanted to say whilst Fofa’s mischievous eyes rested on his. Nervously he looked away. Watching the students as they hurried into their classrooms, Tetteh felt guilty.

“Don’t you think we’d better postpone it till classes are over?” he suggested in an ‘I need to be alone’ sort of voice. Disappointed, she said “All right,” and turned to go.

Watching that cunningly beautiful figure, that went by the name of Lydia Fofa Addo, disappear was such a big relief for Tetteh! He swallowed the saliva that had formed in his mouth. He realized regretfully that he might never have enough courage to do what he had planned. Nor was he prepared to push forward, because that would have made things too bad for him. He must by all means keep Fofa off him.

His mind swept back to the previous week when he first caught Fofa studying him and had left the scene almost immediately. He later discovered that she never took in anything he taught whenever she came into the science lab. For she took delight in watching him rather than listening to what he taught. He once asked her playfully why she often watched him so closely. She had answered, to his utter surprise, that he was very handsome. Now that he had heard what

made her behave that way he was left with the question

of how to make her concentrate on his lessons instead. He had been able to tell her to see him for some discussion, but he didn't know how to say 'it' in the sweetest way. She, on the other hand, had thought that he had also been interested in her and that had been his reason for inviting her for the 'discussion.' He had seen her trying to get close anytime he had been free. But he didn't want to forget his education courses too soon. He remembered that his final month in college had been used by the lecturer in educational psychology to warn them off such temptations.

'Guy D,' as they called the lecturer, had always been serious whenever he came in to discuss such things. He had made the students understand that the temptations existed and that to be tempted was no offense, pointing out in a very mild way that the offense came when one yielded to such temptations. Sometimes, Tetteh remembered, it had been 'Paa Colo,' the vice chancellor, himself who had come to talk about the teacher-pupil relationship. Seated behind the lecturer's desk, Paa Colo would throw his head from side to side trying to see everyone's face in the classroom. It was as if he wanted to know those who would let him down. Often, he had narrated, vividly, all the temptations he had had himself as a young teacher in the field. Tetteh had been the first to laugh when Paa Colo had said, "Those of you who are not married must not go for young caterers, should you be stationed very far from your home." When the laughter had died down Paa Colo had patiently

explained that such caterers often started by making faces at one and one often ended up by putting them in the family way. That had been one of the major reasons why Tetteh was now cooking his own meals and doing all the shopping himself.

Much as he didn't want to let down Guy C, Paa Colo, and his college, he saw the need of using as much care as possible. Guy C would have described such a thing as a "very, very delicate matter to be handled with care." Tetteh couldn't help remembering the day his friend, Al-Haji Shockie, had asked Guy C, "So what am I expected to do if one of the girls I am expected to teach writes a letter to me telling me how much she loves me." It had taken Guy C a full minute to stop the laughter that had broken out. "This is a very vital question," he had said before proceeding to answer it. "In dealing with such a situation", he had explained, "you must first think of the psychological effect it will have on the child, either way.....Supposing you simply tell her that you didn't love her or that she should concentrate on her studies and forget about....well, you know what... you'll be killing her spirits in her. She may even start hating you. And you know what happens when the child you are teaching loses trust in you...If possible, make her feel like you love her too. When you have assured her of your love, it is then that you can be in a position to pilot her mind to her lessons....." Tetteh wondered if some of those educational psychology courses could be applied to his present situation. He knew that if he assured a person like Fofu of his love, things would surely become worse. He amused himself when he said out loud, "Of course Guy C was only teaching us what the psychology books said.

But mine is a very real situation—not a story from books – and what is why his solution may not apply to me now.” Nevertheless, he saw the need to be very nice to Fofo. Or else.

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Fofo chased Tetteh to the laboratory immediately after classes. This time he decided to face her squarely.

“Fofo, I think we need to talk. No. I think I shall have to face facts.” He wondered what facts he was talking about.

Her bright eyes, looking more mischievous than ever, were as usual fixed on his. He had the uncomfortable feeling she was looking right into him. In fact, she literally melted the last bit of courage in him. He thought it would be unwise to keep her standing there when he didn’t know what to tell her next.

“I don’t think I can tell you what I have planned.” Tetteh heard his voice saying shakily, “You can see that whenever you come around my tongue fails me.” She looked away for the first time since she came and stood there. His eyes followed her.

“I think I will have to trust you, master. I know that whenever you are able...” she paused to think. “You will tell me what it is.”

“Fine, I am sure you’ll never regret trusting me.” He said with deep irony. She walked triumphantly away from him.

Tetteh didn't notice the group of students that had drifted to him. The noise from the argument going on made him turn to face them.

"Please, master," one student called. "Does the sun move?"

Tetteh thought, what a silly thing to argue about, "Hm-m, I think not," he said.

"But, master," another student protested as the others shouted, "you hear that, you hear that?"

"We saw it in an encyclopedia yesterday that the sun does move."

"Is that...." Tetteh was caught unawares.

"Yes," two of the student replied.

"Let's see the photograph on that," Tetteh said thoughtfully.

The two boys rushed off to the library and brought back the offending American encyclopedia. One of them opened to the page from memory and handed the book to Tetteh with a jubilant smile. The latter skimmed through the page and forced a smile at the group in front of him.

"Here," he sighed. "It seems everyone is right after all."

But they were all disappointed. He gave them ample time to look into each other's face.

"This book says that the sun, the earth, the moon and all the rest are moving to fast in a body that we.....

"Eh – eh....," the two students interrupted.

"Wait and let me explain," Tetteh said

They kept their peace.

If we could think of it a more carefully we should see that the sun does not move at all,”

“Why?” asked anxious voices.

“Why?” Tetteh repeated. “Because everything else is moving with it,” He paused and looked round the surprised faces. ‘Look it doesn’t make any difference what speed they travel at. The fact still remain that they are all moving in a group. And once the whole group is moving we can’t really say that any single member is moving. It is different though when we come to talk about the earth second movement around the sun.

Whereas in the first case the sun keeps the same distance and position in relation to the other bodies, in the second case the position of the earth changes as it goes on moving round the sun.” He looked up at the dissatisfied look on the faces of some of the students. He scratched his head and buried his head in his hands. He decided to demonstrate what he had been saying.

“Supposing,” he continued, “supposing we here make the sun, the earth, the moon, the stars and the other planets, and supposing we were standing here on a large mat that was traveling at a terrific speed, would you say in comparison to the rest of us, that Kwasi here is moving?”

“No.”

“If on the other hand, I had the chance of moving from one side of this flying mat to another would you say that I was moving?”

“Yes.”

Tetteh was grateful.

“Fine, that’s exactly what is happening in the solar system. Even though everything—including the sun – is traveling across space at that terrific speed there’s practically no change in their individual positions. But the earth apart from this mass movement is spinning on its axis and moving round the sun at the same time and, thus, giving us day and night and the year, respectfully.”

He looked round him again, and then took the student inside the laboratory where he used some other object in the demonstration, which he finally hoped would clarify the point for them. He succeeded at last in making the two parties agree that neither side was wrong.

“Thanks.”

“Thank you, sir,” they said almost at the same time and filed out of the laboratory.

Tetteh was left wondering why such old people should have so great a confidence in so young a man – practically a boy – as he was. Was it because they believed in the saying that a teacher must know everything? Science, they thought, was the answer to all the mysteries on earth. If one was a science teacher, therefore, one was expected to be a walking encyclopedia.

He heaved a sigh.